

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1163

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 5756

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNSAR EC

SUBJ: NARCOTICS: POSSIBLE FUTURE OPIUM SOURCES COUNTRIES

REF: STATE 173247

1. OPIUM POPPIES WERE CULTIVATED EXTENSIVELY THROUGHOUT THE HIGHLANDS OF ECUADOR DURING WORLD WAR II (1936-1946) AND APPARENTLY UNTIL ABOUT 1950. STRONG ACTION BY POLICE AND MILITARY IN DESTROYING MANY CULTIVATIONS IN THE 1950'S AND 1960'S REDUCED PRODUCTION TO PRACTICALLY NIL. ISOLATED INSTANCES OF DISCOVERIES OF CULTIVATIONS HAVE OCCURRED THROUGH THE ENSUEING YEARS. IN THE PAST TWO YEARS THREE INSTANCES OF OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED AND SEVERAL VOLUNTARY (WILD) GROWTHS OF POPPIES HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THE ACTUAL CULTIVATIONS DISCOVERED WAS A 15 HECTARE FIELD OF POPPIES ABOUT 50 MILES FROM THE

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PERUVIAN BORDER NEAR MACARA IN LOJA PROVINCE IN JULY OF

1975. THREE MEN AT WORK INCISING THE POPPIES WERE ARRESTED. THESE MEN, PEASANTS EMPLOYED TO WORK THE FIELDS, HAD LITTLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE MARKETING OF THE OPIUM BUT BELIEVED THE GUM WAS BEING SOLD TO PERUVIAN BUYERS.

2. A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY DEA IN JUNE AND JULY OF 1975 AND TITLED "OPERATION POPPY" DETERMINED THAT THE SOIL, CLIMATE AND ALTITUDE IN ECUADOR ARE SUITABLE FOR OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION.

3. MUCH OF ECUADOR IS INACCESSIBLE EXCEPT BY FOOT AND WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO POLICE. ALL INSTANCES OF DISCOVERY BY LOCAL ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IN THE LAST TEN YEARS CAME ABOUT AS A RESULT OF INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM NON-POLICE SOURCES CONCERNING THE CULTIVATION AND HAVE REQUIRED MARCHES ON FOOT TO LOCATE AND DESTROY THE FIELDS.

4. AN INTERESTING FACT TO CONSIDER IS THE CONSTANT TRAFFIC OF COCAINE BETWEEN ECUADOREAN AND MEXICAN TRAFFICKERS. MANY MEXICAN TRAFFICKERS VISIT ECUADOR FREQUENTLY AND MOST OF THESE MEXICANS HAVE A HISTORY OF HEROIN AND MARIJUANA TRAFFIC AS WELL AS COCAINE. TO DATE THEIR INTEREST HAS BEEN CONFINED TO COCAINE BUT FEASIBLY THIS COULD CHANGE IN ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS IN MEXICO MEET WITH THE HOPED-FOR SUCCESS.

5. BASED ON THE ABOVE RELATED HISTORY OF OPIUM PRODUCTION IN ECUADOR AND ON THE RELATIONS OF ECUADOREAN AND MEXICAN NARCOTIC TRAFFICKERS, WE BELIEVE ECUADOR HAS POTENTIAL TO BECOME AN OPIUM PRODUCER. THE MISSION IS ALERT TO SIGNS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THIS DIRECTION.
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